

Creative Potential of Memes in Foreign Language Training

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Abstract. Internet-memes, new unique cultural units, have been attracting scientists' attention for a long time. The memes are of interest for linguists, culture researchers, and sociologists. Teachers also recognize massive opportunities that the use of memes offers for foreign language training. The present study proposes the effect of nonverbal component of a traditional (visual) Internet-meme on foreign language training. It is the nonverbal component (image, special form of gradation, visual opposition or other representation) that sets a broad context, which can be creatively used by a teacher. There are some practices that allow using the creation of the new culture for training as well as allowing students to rethink the training process in a creative way on their own.

Keywords: e-learning, Internet-memes, language teaching, social networks

1. Introduction

These days the technical progress and a fast-paced environment bring in more and more new ideas and events. Development of social networks and media is leading to a huge volume of information that changes all the time and creates new genres, which allows immediate reaction to events. Instant and fast communication on the Internet has brought about main features of new genre forms: concentration, precedence, emotional intensity, etc. Demotivators, ironic comments, memes have become permanent companions of our existence on the web and a circle of new genre creations in the digital environment is growing wider and is changing.

The young generation is especially sensitive to such changes, that is why it is in the interests of a teacher at least to know about them, and even better — to successfully use them in class. Teachers have been considering education digitalization, which is picking up steam: “Global digitalization forms a new type of culture of the modern society that is digital culture, what requires modernization of the vocational education system to get it ready for relevant appli-

cation of technological innovations and development of professionally relevant skills” [Strokov, 2020, 15]. There has appeared and become widely used such terms as ‘digital pedagogics’, ‘digital didactics’, ‘digital education’. Ilaltdinova, Fedorov and Filchenkova recommend to differentiate these concepts: “In our view the term ‘digital pedagogics’ shall be read as ‘new pedagogics’, i.e. a field of scholarly knowledge in the system of pedagogical sciences that provides the essence, regularities of education, its role in development of personality, and works out application ways and means to improve the results of training processes with the help of open educational resources, information technologies in order to decentralize pedagogical process, refocus it on student’s activity, autonomisation and academic mobility” [Ilaltdinova, Fedorov, Filchenkova, 2017, 15]. They say that it is unacceptable to limit digital pedagogics to digital training, and they define digital pedagogics as new, involving larger opportunities. Therefore, a teacher has to take the creations of digital reality and communication as a way to raise and develop each student.

2. Material for Study

One of the brightest aspects of new web communication is Internet-memes, new unique cultural units. Memes are of interest for linguists, culture researchers, and sociologists. Teachers also recognize massive opportunities that the use of memes offers for foreign language training. The present study proposes the effect of nonverbal components of a traditional (visual) internet-mem on foreign language training. It is the nonverbal components (image, special form of gradation, visual opposition or other representation) that sets a broad context, which can be creatively used by a teacher.

Cyberculture is a dynamic system responsive to changes, and it has a lot of meeting points with the youth culture. Memes represent a microhistory based on precedent texts or events. Awareness of these precedents is a key to understanding memes, therefore, memes are encoded cultural units, unavailable to those who are not aware of the situation or the phrase that preceded their creation. Wide spreading of memes is associated with availability of such a form of contemporary culture, when one image replaces thousands of words. Another important feature of memes is their flexibility, they can be easily changed to match any situation according to the author’s wit and intentions. Now when education answers the call of time moving towards renovation and modernization, implementation of such unusual and mobile tools into pedagogical process appears very useful. Moreover, education

is rapidly evolving into new forms, more courses and classes are available online that produces demand for the use of concise and bright images.

3. Methodology

The study is based on a system approach to foreign language training, where emotional involvement and the interest of students play an important role. This paper represents a theoretical underpinning of Internet-memes use in foreign language class. The reason for writing this paper is a long-term study of Internet-memes as a new polymodal genre of contemporary culture as well as their characteristic features that favor memes implementation in the training process. Analysis of use of communicative teaching methods as well as ways of active involvement of students in class helped to find how Internet-memes could be used not only as a visual material, but as a special training tool. The study of modern foreign language training methods that preceded this paper, showed the need to attract a wide range of new digital products that surround us every day. The methodological reason for this paper is related to the general provisions of communicative and competency-based approaches in foreign language training. The competency-based approach suggests that a student should not only gain knowledge but would also be able to apply it in various situations. Skills and reflection are supposed to be bind together. The communicative approach sets its goal in training 'communicative competency'. The use of Internet-memes in various forms will allow developing and reinforcing the necessary skills. A new reality brings new requirements and multiliteracy is one of them. Unlike the traditional understanding of literacy, where the main skills were reading and writing, multiliteracy implies emotional, cognitive, civil and cultural skills. Multiliteracy is especially important in foreign language training. Based on the link between 'language', 'understanding' and 'educational environment' A. Haardt, Sulima argues: "Consequently understanding cannot be only a special perception of words, a system of distinct signs. Understanding inevitably includes the understanding of quiet, pauses, everything unvoiced and unspoken, silence" [Sulima, 2019, 16].

4. Study Description

For the first time memes were mentioned in the context of exact sciences. Biologist Richard Dawkins became an author of a new term created on the basis of a Greek word 'mimetes' (imitating thing). Dawkins referred to the meme as to a unit of cultural information, a measurement unit of some-

thing that, in his view, differentiates a human being from animals, this is what he wrote about in his work 'The Selfish Gene' [Dawkins, 1976]. Dawkins defined the characteristic feature of a meme, its capability of self-replication, what allowed this unit to exist in time and replicate. Similar to genes, memes could be weak (unattractive and not supporting survival) and strong (attractive and ensuring survival). Unlike genes, memes are capable of passing from one person to another rather easily and exclusively through communication, not requiring biological transmission. Later on the Dawkins' theory become widely spread and gave birth to a new science called memetics, originating scholarly discussions on the internal and external nature of a meme, on principle of combining memes in complexes, the internal structure of a meme, etc.

Growth of the Internet originated new discursive modality, which is now an important part of contemporary culture. Active adoption of new communication space boosted the appearance of a new type of memes. Internet-memes circulate on the Internet and have a viral nature. They can include a short text, an image, a melody. Some scientists compare Internet-memes with folklore, which, in our view, is rather fair. With their brand new technologically-driven form of life and circulation, Internet-memes are also a folk art, where the author (narrator) can make changes. In the present study we will focus on considering the creative potential of visual Internet-memes. Such memes are a combination of an image and a text. As a rule, the image and the text are put in a square box what is explained by active circulation of such memes on Instagram, which sets a certain image format. Despite the fact that such memes are usually called visual (because of the image they contain) actually they have a polymodal nature, because they employ several sensory channels. In addition to the combination of a viral image and a text such memes have specific visual organization resulting in binary opposition or, quite often, gradation. At the same time, all components of the meme are significant and recognizable. Consequently, the structure of the visual Internet-meme includes verbal and nonverbal components. The verbal component is represented by a caption, a slogan, a phrase from a song or a movie that accompanies an image. The nonverbal component has more complex and implicit organization. In addition to a photo or an image, a meme often has specific visual organization of text. Quite often there are oppositions, ironic contrast pairs selected on the principle of 'acceptable' - 'unacceptable', 'known' - 'unknown', etc. A famous example of such a meme is a popular meme with two photos of the musician Drake, where his facial expression shows an attitude to some event (satisfaction and dissatis-

faction). At the same time, in further development of the meme, the musician is replaced with other people who are closer to the context of the expression which accumulates the ironic charge of the content. Another example is a popular meme with two images of two women and a cat under the table. The 'plot' of the meme is that the cat drives the women crazy by misreading a text that could be interpreted and understood ambivalently.

As a verbal component there can be price tags, signs, parts of a page, any text with graphics allowing ambivalent interpretation. Memes that include the gradation of three-four steps are also very popular. For example, an event is depicted in various ways and gets totally absurd. One of the traditional contemporary memes is a game with the whole and a part, when attention is drawn to some detail in the image provided with some ironic text.

Therefore, the following groups of memes can be distinguished:

1. binary — they are based on opposition, antithesis based on 'good'-'bad', 'before'-'now', 'expectation'-'reality', etc. The special subgroup is formed by memes based on the opposition of 'easy'-'hard'.

2. cumulative memes with gradation — as a rule they are based on representation of one and the same phenomena progressively in a more complex way.

3. emotional — the visual basis of such memes are photos of vividly expressed emotions (happiness, horror, etc.). As a rule, they are provided with some text "When you...", which gives a short description of the situation, where this emotion is expressed.

Both verbal and nonverbal components of a meme give it special emotional charge, where it is not the value of the expression that is important (and not its artistic value), nor the beauty of the image, but a powerful affective charge. Memes are anonymous and, at the same time, absolutely any person can become an author of a meme, therefore, the authorship gains a spontaneous collective nature. S. V. Kanashina points out such features of memes as emotional intensity, media incidence, viral nature, series, replicability [Kanashina, 2018].

It is also necessary to note frequent use of conversational vocabulary or even taboo words in Internet-memes. While choosing material a teacher should be scrupulous about the choice.

Memes can be used to study any subject from mathematics to literature as a means to establish first contact and introduce rules to students. A teacher can take any well-known meme and add some text to it, for example, "My face, when I hear talking in class". However, it is worth saying that overuse of such

methods may lead to the opposite effect especially if students expect a strict attitude; they came to study and all of a sudden they get entertainment which they have not deserved yet. In the tradition of Russian higher education this method is applicable in small groups, when students' response and emotional involvement are more important than a strict academic atmosphere. At lower grade levels in school this method seems quite appropriate.

Memes have a great advantage over traditional and widely known visual material such as photos and images provided with some text. Implementation of this genre of contemporary Internet culture in class will allow a teacher to diversify the training process. Students who are familiar with memes may feel more relaxed and bold, when they see the material they know, which can allay anxiety when studying a new complex subject. Despite there seeming a lack of connection between Internet-memes and academic program study, these two components can be successfully linked in one chain.

It seems obvious that English-language memes can be used as authentic texts. However, some stipulations should be made. Firstly, as it has been mentioned, the text itself is not of any specific value. Secondly, the original memes are marked by the use of conversational vocabulary or imitation of spoken language. Nevertheless, at certain stages of language training it is quite acceptable to use such material, provided that students understand intentional change in meaning of a phrase and know what 'errative' (or cograph) means. Even with such narrow use, memes win over other short authentic texts (signs, advertisements, notes), because they offer certain emotional intensity and make an appeal to the sense of humor of the recipient. In foreign language training memes can serve as an example, where students will have to find certain language phenomena. Memes can be used in such a way in the following courses: 'Speaking and Writing Practice', 'Communication Practice', 'Practical Training', 'Lexicology', 'Stylistics'. Both grammatical and lexical phenomena can be often found in memes. In addition to usage examples of vocabulary, a teacher can use memes to illustrate the use of pronouns, verb forms (especially non-finite verb forms — they are rarely changed in meaning), adjectives and their forms, contracted words, abbreviations. Giving a short text in the form of a meme also allows students to see that the phenomena, which they study, are much closer to real life and exist not only in the educational community. Sometimes students tend to think that the language they study at university and the 'real' foreign language they may come across in movies, social networks, are too far from each other.

It often happens because they do not know functional styles of a language and how to use them, when simplified youth slang is more frequent in life than academic or scientific language, the first one is mistaken for the norm. In fact, such implementation of contemporary culture in class usually has a positive impact on the general atmosphere.

When we talk about foreign language training, we should remember that the most important part of this process is language practice. Usually a training course is organized in such a way that a new section is dedicated to certain vocabulary, for example, travelling, Higher education in English. A new topic can be introduced with the help of memes. Students will be able to guess the topic that follows as well as talk about the problems reflected by the meme. As a rule, a teacher employs many techniques to train monologues and dialogues by letting students speak a foreign language, participate in discussion and role plays. Here memes can also prove useful. Instead of traditional descriptions of a situation or a problem, it is possible to use memes that briefly describe students' attitude to the situation or to the problem they need to speak about.

Most commonly, foreign language training includes home reading. Usually there is a book to be read at home and then they do exercises in class or discuss the content. It can be their homework to choose a meme to check if they have understood an excerpt or the whole book. Students find a meme, which, in their view, best reflects the main idea of the book. It is best to have this meme presentation accompanied with an oral explanation, a prepared speech, where a student comments on his/her choice and demonstrates his/her analytical skills. Consequently, it is possible to train an important skill of rendering complex ideas in simple words. Switching between style registers (conversational register of the text in the meme and common register of a foreign language in class) requires good concentration and ability to render the content with different means. Also student learn to communicate their ideas clearly and distinctly and find the basics in the information flow.

The use of different style registers is also an excellent exercise especially in the framework of such courses as 'Lexicology' or 'Stylistics'. For example, there was one popular meme divided into two parts with a short extract from a well-known song on the left and the same extract, but written with the higher register, scientific and official language, on the right, lending a comic effect to the extract. The right part was headed 'IELTS', mentioning a well-known examination. Let us give an example, We don't talk anymore —

You and I no longer engage in verbal confabulations. For non-native speakers it is very important to feel the pertinent use of style registers because their misuse may put a speaker in an awkward situation. Considering such memes and further creation of similar memes is an excellent practice to transform a phrase from one style to another and this transformation can be made in both directions. It is especially interesting to do such exercises in small groups and compare the results.

There is another interesting exercise where students correct texts with mistakes in memes: add missing verb forms, missing punctuation. In the end the meme slightly might lose its humorous character, but students have a chance to correct mistakes. There is a web site GrammarCatz [<http://grammarcatz.blogspot.com/>] that offers online exercises to correct mistakes made in memes.

Potential of Internet-memes use in class is much wider because of their polymodal nature which ensures development of creative, visual and associative thinking. Memes as a training and learning tool helps to switch to the special level of reflection, when students apply their own judgement to the material they have learnt and give their feedback on the form of memes.

The next stage in use of memes in a foreign language class can be an active role of students in the reflection on a meme. Students are offered a meme, where they replace text with their own phrase so that the meme would express a rule or a phenomenon of the language. The meme, that we have already mentioned, with a famous musician expressing his approval and disapproval can be used to compare two phenomena. For example, students can write expressions that would get a low and high mark from the teacher; they compare common words that they know from early stages of learning with more complex vocabulary that they have just learnt: tasty dish — mouth-watering delicacy. It is possible to use such opposition and ask students to compare a common mistake and a correct version, for example: Me and my friends — My friends and I. In order to achieve the same goal, i.e. compare correct and incorrect versions, it is possible to use other memes with similar nonverbal content. The more emotive a meme, the better effect it has. It is possible to ask students to find common mistakes in class and share in a group reflection.

Memes based on gradation can be used to systematize grammatical material, to build a certain hierarchy based on complication. For example: Present Simple — Present Perfect — Present Perfect Continuous. Or: Gerund Active Simple — Gerund Active Perfect — Gerund Passive Perfect, etc. It

is possible to ask students to prepare such memes, exchange them and then write down their examples in accordance with the forms they got. In addition to training grammatical skills, this exercise is useful also because the unusual form of an exercise gives a better training effect.

In the framework of the courses 'Home Reading' or 'Text Interpretation' it is possible to use such a type of binary meme that includes two parts with the following captions: What the author meant — What the English teacher said the author meant. Such a meme allows rallying on a careful analysis of each word in a piece of work as often happens in such lessons. Students can find examples from the text on their own and play the role of the very 'English teacher' on the right who is looking for special meaning everywhere. This exercise activates associative thinking, where the plane of content can be infinitely wider and the plane of expression can be rather limited. It is possible to offer students to guess the texts, where the phrases were taken from, by giving them a detailed comment in the meme. It is possible to make the task harder by opening only the second part with the comment, but, here, the text should really be well-known.

By giving students such freedom of expression it is possible to get unexpected results, find out that some topics turn out to be difficult for them, and others not. Such feedback is extremely valuable, since it is a result of students' reflection on their activity. Such reflection allows students, on the one hand, to see their strengths and weaknesses, and on the other hand, together with the teacher find ways to optimize their studies in vocabulary and grammar acquisition.

Not only training material can be an object of reflection, but the training process as a whole. i. e. revising for exams or rules of behavior in class, etc. Despite their apparent shallowness 'expectation', 'reality' memes sometimes help us to see important problems, especially when students are undisposed to discuss them with their teacher. Ironic form helps to make it easier.

5. Study Results

Some groups of Internet-memes (binary, cumulative, emotional) that we have distinguished are of interest from the point of their use in class as they allow reaching several goals:

- 1) use of modern visual material well-known to students
- 2) breaking down a barrier between students and a teacher, emotional involvement
- 3) involvement in discussion

- 4) reflection
- 5) use of polymodal communication units in class, development of creative thinking and multiliteracy
- 6) training process improvement

6. Conclusions

Internet-memes are an important and fast growing part of contemporary culture. They are emotional, concise, capable of self-replication, anonymous. Having become a form of new folklore of the age of Internet, memes are viral units of culture; the content is ample and often serves as a response to the issues related to public concerns. It was not our purpose to classify the huge variety of memes on the Internet. We have tried to arrange the main memes that allow diversification of the training process. It goes without saying that the talent and creativity of a teacher are not limited to using memes only.

This paper considers the value of a new polymodal genre of contemporary Internet culture, i.e. Internet memes, history of the term as well as its further academic development. Under the steady development of the training process, there is a growing necessity to find and implement new means and tools. Internet memes are considered from the point of their use in foreign language training. In addition to their apparent value as a visual material in class, the polymodal nature of a meme, formed by its verbal and nonverbal parts, has great creative potential.

Deconstructing and re-creation of meaning in a meme is an excellent practice in rethinking immediately involved training material as well as, more broadly, in multiliteracy.

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Code Switching as a Peculiar Feature of Digital Communication in Multilingual Settings

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Abstract. Digital communication, which has now taken a leading place among various types of language communication, reflects many specific features of communication in the context of bi — and multilingualism. The article considers switching of language codes as one of the typical features of digital communication and identifies the role of each language involved in this process. The main purpose of the article is to identify the most typical functions of code-switching in Kazakhstani multilingual settings. Our work is based on the material excerpted from 3 chats in WhatsApp messenger by means of continuous sampling. It shows that Russian language in bilingual communication works frequently as a modal and emotional framework of utterance with the predominance of Kazakh language as a means of communication.

Keywords: virtual communication, code-switching, code-switching functions, communicative situation, coordinate bilingualism